

Ergonomics demonstration project: Landscaping

Need

The landscaping industry is among the top 12 industries in Washington State with high rates and numbers of Work-Related Musculoskeletal Disorders (WMSDs). Overexertion injuries, such as those that occur when lifting, pushing, pulling and carrying, accounted for 95 percent of the workers compensation claims accepted by the Department of Labor and Industries from the landscaping industry between 1991 and 1998. Most injuries involve the back, wrists and shoulders.

The landscaping industry is one of the first industries that will be required to comply with the ergonomics rule. In the spring of 2001, the Department of Labor and Industries contacted a small landscaping company, with the help of the Washington Association of Landscape Professionals, to participate in a demonstration project.

Goals

The goals of the landscaping demonstration project are to:

- Demonstrate that employers and employees of landscape companies can identify potential risk factors and hazards covered by the ergonomics rule.
- Identify possible controls that will reduce or eliminate identified hazards in compliance with the ergonomics rule.
- Disseminate information from the project within the landscaping industry.

Project design

The participating company is involved in two different operations, running a retail nursery and landscaping. In this project, the focus is on the landscaping branch. The employer and members of the safety committee will review the activities performed during landscaping and identify potential hazards according to the ergonomics rule. A representative of L&I, working with the company, will review the group's findings and use site visits to confirm the findings. Additionally, the L&I representative and the company will work to identify potential controls and process changes that will reduce or eliminate the identified hazards.

Similar to construction, the work involved in landscaping varies, depending on the work site, the magnitude of the job and the season. Therefore, it is important that employers are aware of the risk factors that can be present during each activity and of the time required to complete each activity. This is necessary to determine if the risk factors are hazards that require controls and if the employer is in compliance.

Timetable

April 2001Contact company and obtained their participation
May 2001Begin work site visits to become familiar with activities
October 2001Complete hazard identification
December 2001Complete final report and materials for distribution to general industry

Results

The project will result in three products:

- A report to the participating company, summarizing their results in identifying potential WMSD hazards and possible solutions.
- An article, summarizing the results of the project and the identification of potential hazards, published in NWLP, a publication of the Washington Association of Landscape Professionals
- Pictures that can be used on the L&I website and for ergonomic awareness training.